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Winchester News - Special Edition

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

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Table of Contents

- That's a Wrap: Spring Town Meeting Concludes after Three Sessions
- Comings and Goings
- Staffing
- DID YOU KNOW....
- Winchester by the Numbers (2022)
- Town Budget at a Glance
- Mark Your Calendar*

May 3, 2023

That's a Wrap: Spring Town Meeting Concludes after Three Sessions

Traffic Funding Source Changed, Bylaw Proposals Denied, FY24 Budget Approved

By: Jennifer Haefeli

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Winchester, MA — Spring Town Meeting concluded its business just before 10 pm on Monday, May 1, after three sessions where Town Meeting Members voted down two bylaw proposals, changed the funding source for Lynch Traffic improvements, and approved Winchester's first balanced budget in a decade.

With a new start time of 6:30 pm, Spring Town Meeting kicked off on April 24, with subsequent sessions on April 27 and May 1. Approximately 150 members of the 192-member body were present at each session in the Winchester High School auditorium, where Town Moderator Heather von Mering presided with the assistance of Town Clerk MaryEllen Lannon.

Most items passed easily, including the $150 million town budget for fiscal year 2024 (FY24: July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024). Town Meeting also approved a 6.5 percent increase in water and sewer rates (which does not apply to the $30 service fee). However, a handful of issues generated significant debate and raised pointed questions and concerns from Town Meeting.

The biggest controversy of Spring Town Meeting revolved around the funding source for work related to traffic improvements associated with the Lynch Elementary School Project. The Select Board and Capital Planning Committee proposed borrowing $400,000 to pay for the engineering study in question. The Finance Committee unanimously opposed the borrowing proposal, suggesting that the town instead use some of its unallocated American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds of about $3.5 million. The Select Board ruled out the use of ARPA funds, and the Finance Committee suggested the Capital Stabilization Fund as another alternative funding source. Many Town Meeting Members also voiced concerns about borrowing funds given their understanding that traffic improvements around Lynch would be funded by the new tax voters approved in the January 2023 Special Election. Ultimately, after changing the funding source to the Capital Stabilization Fund, Town Meeti approved the funds (140-12, with 2 abstentions). (All votes are noted as Yes

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votes-No votes. However, Spring Town Meeting results have not yet been legally certified by the town. Certification is expected May 8.)

Also sparking debate were two proposals from the Planning Board related to zoning bylaws. One, presented as a scrivener's error, would have reduced the minimum lot width in one section of town from 120 feet to 100 feet. The other would have modified the language in the bylaw related to special permits for nonconforming homes. Changes to bylaws require two-thirds of the votes to pass, and both proposals failed (82-60, with 4 abstentions, and 68-71, with 6 abstentions, respectively).

Not as controversial, but still generating some discussion, was a request from the Planning Board to add $52,500 back into to its FY24 budget for consulting fees. The Finance Committee struck this amount from the Planning Board's initial request. The Select Board supported the Planning Board's request, but the Finance Committee opposed it. After some discussion, Town Meeting approved the request (94-46, with 2 abstentions), which will come from Free Cash, and leave the FY24 Budget balanced as presented.

Jennifer Haefeli, Tara Hughes, and Shukong Ou are part of a group of Winchester residents exploring the launch of a local news publication for Winchester. In full disclosure, all are Town Meeting Members and previously served on the Communications Study Committee (CSC). For more information about Winchester News or to get involved, contact us at hello@winchesternews.org.

IN BRIEF *Contributors: Tara Hughes, Shukong Ou, Jennifer Haefeli*

Comings and Goings

- **Town Planner:** Town Planner Brian Szekely resigned in January 2023 and took the Town Planner position in Danvers.

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- **Department of Public Works (DPW):** Robert Labossiere took over as the new DPW Director in mid-March following the retirement of longtime DPW Director Jay Gill. Mr. Labossiere brings with him 18 years of experience and previously served as the DPW Director in Peabody and Middleton.
- **Fire Department:** After 37 years of service to Winchester, Fire Chief Rick Tustin will retire at the end of April. Fire Captain Steve Osborne, who has served in the Winchester Fire Department for 28 years, will be the new Fire Chief.
- **Library:** Nicole Langley became the new Library Director in July 2022, after the retirement of longtime Library Director Ann Wirtanen.

Staffing

- **Help Wanted:** Winchester is seeking a Town Planner and a Town Engineer. Although an offer for the Town Planner position was made earlier this year, that candidate took another position. The Planning Board has been doing the work of the Town Planner for the last several months and would like to see the town hire both a Town Planner and an Assistant Town Planner.
- **New Staff Positions:** The approved budget includes the following new or expanded positions:
  - Network Administrator (IT Department)
  - Financial Analyst (Treasurer's office)
  - Part-time support (Zoning Board of Appeals)
  - Full-time Health Inspector (previously part-time)
- **Volunteers Needed:** The Conservation Commission and the Finance Committee both have open seats and welcome qualified volunteers to join them.

DID YOU KNOW....

- The Board of Health launched a new pilot program that uses "s
boxes" to exterminate rats without using rodenticide, helping
raptors like eagles and hawks.

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- You can check out a Chromebook, metal detector, thermal camera, and decibel meter from the Library of Things at Winchester Public Library.
- The library renovated the children's room in 2021, and the young adult section will be revamped this year.
- Over the last 10 years, the average tax bill for a single family home has increased 59%.

Winchester by the Numbers (2022)

18: Covid deaths
34: Lyme disease cases
73: Restaurants inspected (by Board of Health)
150: Acres of conservation land
147,000: Library visitors
644,000: Items checked out from library

Town Budget at a Glance

FY24 Total Budget: $149,984,244
FY24 Education Budget: $63,582,130
Average Tax Bill (Single Family Home): $16,220

Mark Your Calendar*

- May 4: Job Fair at the Jenks, 8:30-10:00 am (Jenks Center)
- May 6: Daddy-Daughter Dance, 2:00-4:00 pm (Town Hall Auditorium)
- May 7: Music Maynia, 1:00-5:00 pm (Winchester Community Music School)
- May 10: 100 Years of the League of Women Voters, 6:30-8:30 pm (Wright-Locke Farm)
- May 11: Emerging Housing Opportunities in Winchester, 1:00-2:30 pm (Jenks Center)
- May 19: EnKa Fair, 5:00-11:00 pm (Jenks and Town Hall Parking Lot)
- May 20: EnKa Fair, 10:00 am-10:00 pm (Jenks and Town Hall P… Lot)

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- May 20: Shredding Day, 9:00 am-1:00 pm (Transfer Station - rescheduled from May 13)
- June 2: Winchester High School Graduation (Manchester Field)
- June 2: Winchester Town Day Kick-Off, 6:30-10:00 pm (Downtown)
- June 3: Winchester Town Day
- June 10: PMC Kids Ride to benefit the Jimmy Fund, 8:00-11:30 am (Lynch neighborhood)
- June 10: Hazardous Waste Collection (Transfer Station)

* See the town calendar for more information and any updates.

Correction: The original version of this publication indicated the Board of Health had an open seat. It does not. We regret the error.
Clarification: The Education Budget (referred to as the School Budget in the original version of this publication) includes $63,194,386 for the Winchester Public Schools and $387,744 for the vocational program.

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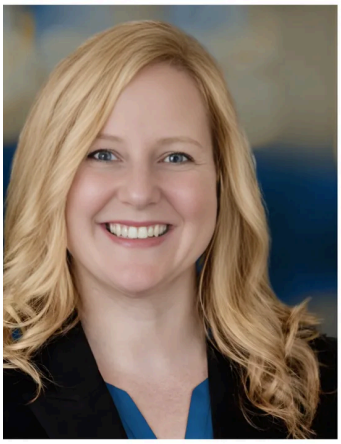

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and

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district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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March 4, 2026

NEWS

Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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GIRLS GOTTA RUN
MIND & MATTER

EVENTS

Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On

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High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS
March 4, 2026

Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

March 4, 2026

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